

FRESNO - Today Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging the State Department to work expeditiously toward the evacuation of American Citizens stranded in Cancun, Mexico after the tragedies brought on by Hurricane Wilma.

Following is the text of the letter:

Dr. Condoleezza Rice

Secretary

U.S. Department of State

2201 C Street, NW

Washington, DC 20520

Dear Dr. Rice:

I am writing to request an immediate response on the U.S. Department of State (DOS) efforts to evacuate American Citizens left stranded in Cancun, Mexico after the devastating effects of Hurricane Wilma.

Hurricane Wilma and its potential devastating impact were highly predictable. While the U.S. government was not responsible for preparing evacuation and emergency plans for areas outside of our borders, we do bear some responsibility for providing American citizens with emergency relief and evacuation assistance after a disaster occurs. American tourists still stranded on Cancun deserve to have adequate food, water, and medical care, in addition to assurances that they will be evacuated in a timely fashion. It is my understanding, based on information I have received from the Department of State Congressional Desk, Vice Consul William E. Herzog at the Consulate in Merida and the DOS Task Force assisting US citizens in Mexico (1-888-407-4747), that there was a total lack of preparation and now lack of cooperation and willingness by the Mexican Government in allowing people to get to the airport for evacuation. I believe our own government bares responsibility for getting them home safely.

In my 20th Congressional District in California, I have six constituents in shelters in Cancun waiting to return to the United States, two at the Moon Palace Shelter and four at the Radisson Hotel. It is my understanding that the Mexican Government is not allowing my constituents out of the shelter to travel to the Cancun Airport without proper documentation showing they have a flight leaving the Cancun Airport. This is an impossible request given the lack of access to obtain this documentation. It is my understanding that American tour groups in Cancun are getting priority in evacuating over those citizens traveling on their own, such as my constituents. It is also my understanding, contrary to DOS reports, that my constituents and other U.S. citizens located at the Radisson Shelter in Cancun do not have access to water, food and appropriate medical assistance.

We have the capabilities to fly American citizens out of harm's way and I feel we need to act right now. Please advise me on what steps the U.S. Department of State is taking to bring Americans home from Cancun immediately and what steps are being taken in the meantime to assure all stranded Americans in Cancun have the appropriate water, food and medical assistance in their shelters.

I urge you to take immediate action to return safely and as soon as possible the constituents in my district and all other Americans left stranded in Cancun.

Sincerely,

JIM COSTA

Member of Congress

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